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SUBJECT: ITURI UPDATE: FARDC CONTINUES ATTACKS ON MILITIAS

Classified By: PolOff CBrown, reasons 1.4 b/d.

¶11. (C) Summary. The Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic of Congo (FARDC), with logistical support from MONUC troops, are continuing their attacks on militia elements in Ituri and are achieving more operational successes. However, a new resurgence of MRC activity in the northern section of Ituri, near Uganda, is causing villagers to flee in advance of expected hostilities. MONUC sources say there will be military operations against this militia group within the next couple of days. End Summary.

¶12. (C) During the week of November 21, approximately 700 FARDC soldiers (with MONUC logistical support) conducted search-and-cordon missions around the town of Kabaga, about 25 kilometers south of Bunia, to clean out the remnants of the militia group Congolese Revolutionary Movement (MRC). During several days of fighting, MONUC military officials report that between 60-70 militia were killed, while one FARDC soldier died. Officials say the operations dispersed the remaining MRC cadres in that area and greatly disrupted their movements. One MONUC official declared the operation as another successful mission by the FARDC in confronting the militia threat in Ituri. Troops in and around Kabaga are now being moved to face challenges elsewhere in the district.

¶13. (C) At the same time, MONUC military officials report a growing threat from MRC elements led by Peter Karim. MONUC believes Karim's group, which has been concentrated recently around the Fataki-Masikini area about 50 kilometers north of Bunia, is being reinforced by the remnants of the Union for Congolese Patriots/Lubanga (UPC/L). MONUC reports that several meetings have taken place between the two groups recently, and within the past week, Karim's soldiers have been seen reinforcing their positions. MONUC also believes Karim's group, estimated to be between 500-800 strong, is reasonably well-armed, as there have been indications and reports of military resupply efforts and quite a bit of small arms trafficking near the border with Uganda.

¶14. (C) Karim, a former battalion commander with the Front for National Integration, is part of a small group of hard-core fighters who chose not to enter the demobilization process. MONUC officials believe he is involved in the militia movement more for economic than political reasons. Officials say he is deeply involved in timber and mineral exploitation in the region and trades illegally across the border with Uganda in exchange for weapons and money.

¶15. (C) MONUC further reports that Karim's group has been trying to secure a route from their base north towards the Mahagi territory bordering Uganda. According to MONUC, Karim's militia encountered November 22-23 some FARDC troops patrolling north of the town of Nioka. Several firefights broke out between the two groups, and one FARDC soldier has been killed in the fighting; MONUC has no reliable reports of militia deaths from these encounters. The FARDC has withdrawn direct contact with Karim as there are only 100 of its forces in the area at present. MONUC officials say Karim has retreated south towards Nioka.

¶16. (C) In response, the FARDC (again with MONUC logistical support) is planning military operations against Karim. MONUC officials say operations will commence "in the next couple of days." Currently, FARDC troops who completed the operations in Kabaga are being transported north to the Mahagi territory. MONUC officials report the level of forces the FARDC will use will be "equal to the threat" being posed.

¶17. (C) As a result of the skirmishes between Karim and the FARDC, in addition to exploitation by the militia, villagers from Nioka have been reportedly fleeing south from the area in significant numbers. MONUC officials could not say exactly how many had fled thus far, but did report a marked increase in the number of people evacuating the area during the past week.

¶18. (C) Comment: Despite recent successes by FARDC and MONUC in Ituri, there is growing discontent among the local population that not enough is being done to protect them. Repeated displacements due to militia attacks, plus frequent preying on the local economies by the militias, is fueling anti-MONUC sentiment in particular, according to one MONUC source. But as events in Kabaga and elsewhere demonstrate, FARDC and MONUC are getting closer to breaking the back of

the militia movement and establishing peace in the Ituri
region. End Comment.
DOUGHERTY